

GOLF



#1 HARBOUR TOWN GOLF LINKS SEA PINES RESORT

David Wilding on the 18th green at Harbour Town. Photo by Ken Bowman.



THE 50 BEST GOLF COURSES IN SC 2005

BY TRENT BOUTS

JUST AS TWO OF GOLF'S MORE DISTINCTIVE FIGURES BADE VERY DIFFERENT FAREWELLS IN 2005, THEIR STAMP ON THE GAME GREW STRONGER IN THE PALMETTO STATE. IN JULY, JACK NICKLAUS WAVED GOODBYE TO THE COMPETITIVE GAME FROM ST. ANDREWS' SWILKEN BRIDGE. A MONTH EARLIER, MIKE STRANTZ LOST HIS LONG AND COURAGEOUS BATTLE WITH CANCER. NOW ABSENT IN THEIR SEPARATE SENSES, EACH IS MORE PRESENT THAN EVER IN YET ANOTHER. FOR BOTH WERE CLEAR WINNERS IN THE SECOND ANNUAL POLL OF THE SOUTH CAROLINA GOLF COURSE RATINGS PANEL. COURSES THEY DESIGNED FORGED UP THE CHART OF THE BEST 50 IN THE STATE.

Three Nicklaus courses debuted in the top 50 including the **MAY RIVER CLUB AT PALMETTO BLUFF**, voted best new course in the state, which landed with a meteoric splash at No. 5. **THE RESERVE AT WOODSIDE PLANTATION** arrived at No. 41 and the **MELROSE COURSE AT DAUFUSKIE ISLAND** at No. 43. Of course, along with Pete Dye, Nicklaus also has his name on **HARBOUR TOWN GOLF LINKS** on Hilton Head Island, which retained its premier status as South Carolina's best of all.

Strantz, from Mt. Pleasant, never set foot on the PGA Tour let alone sniffed any of the 18 Major championships that Nicklaus won. But his work as a golf course architect is its own unique record, sadly now, of a talent denied the rich fruition time surely would have delivered. Strantz's **BULLS BAY GOLF CLUB** in Awendaw was the only course other than May River to break into the top 10 in 2005, doing so at No. 10. With ridges riding man-made dunes, fairways wide open to coastal winds, and greens that test imagination as much as skill, Bulls Bay defines the boldness suggested in the Strantz company name, Maverick Design.

Strantz's neighbor projects on Pawleys Island, **CALEDONIA GOLF AND FISH CLUB** and

TRUE BLUE PLANTATION, also made ground. Caledonia advanced seven places to No. 17, while True Blue nudged ahead one to No. 33.

Results were not so uniformly positive for courses from the hand of prolific genius, Tom Fazio, of Hendersonville, NC. On the positive side, **SAGE VALLEY GOLF CLUB** outside Aiken comfortably retained the No. 2 spot and his design at **BAREFOOT RESORT IN MYRTLE BEACH** moved into the top 50, at No. 50. Another, the **BERESFORD CREEK COURSE AT DANIEL ISLAND**, shot up 11 slots to No. 25, after golf panelists visited the course in March. A regular host of U.S. Open qualifying rounds, the Beresford Creek Course gains a much-anticipated sibling at Daniel Island this year, with the opening of the **RALSTON CREEK COURSE** by Rees Jones. On the flipside, three Fazio courses slipped five places or more on the top 50 list and another three slid off altogether.

A number of factors can influence a course's standing from one year to the next. The simple fact that the South Carolina Golf Course Ratings Panel is less than two years old is one. A primary goal of the panel in its early years is to ensure exposure to as many courses for as many panel-



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ists as possible. While every panelist is an avid golfer, their log of courses played varies considerably. That disparity will even out over time as panel officials work with course owners and managements to ensure panelists experience the best in the state.

Weather is another variable. It is a sad but simple fact that for periods last year, some courses were not at their best. Mother Nature presented many golf course superintendents with the agronomic equivalent of trying to hit a one-iron from a downhill lie against a strong wind to an elevated green with a blind hole location. United States Golf Association agronomists, who visit hundreds of courses in the Carolinas each year, declared the summer of 2005 the "worst" for bentgrass greens in a decade. Heavy rain, then intense heat, followed by a sustained dry spell, relegated course conditioning below the battle for turf survival on the list of daily priorities.

Then there's the age of the beast. The new **MEMBERS CLUB AT GRANDE DUNES** made an impressive debut in the top 50 at No. 31. That's better than **THE PATRIOT AT GRAND HARBOR** managed in 2004, when it won best

new course of the year. The Patriot ranked No. 39 in 2004 but with another year of maturity, improved to No. 30 in 2005. That augurs well for the Members Club, designed by Nick Price and Craig Schreiner. Clearly adolescent less than 12 months after opening, the course will gain in character as trees and shrubs grow, shaping holes and vistas.

Older courses, such as **KINGS NORTH** in Myrtle Beach and **GREENWOOD COUNTRY CLUB** in Greenwood, can find themselves squeezed out for little reason other than limited space. Someone has to make room for the newcomers after all.

While the May River Club and the Members Club at Grande Dunes made the biggest impressions in the 2005 poll, attention should be paid to the 16-rung climb of **THE CLIFFS AT GLASSY**. Designed by another South Carolina-based architect, Tom Jackson, of Taylors, The Cliffs at Glassy features one of the most spectacular views in American golf, not just in South Carolina. At something like 3,000-feet, the green at the par-three 13th affords a heavenly sight to the lands below.

Another big mover in 2005 was **TIDE-WATER GOLF CLUB AND PLANTATION**

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in North Myrtle Beach. Abutting tidal marshes with views to the Atlantic Ocean, Tidewater was designed by yet another South Carolinian, Ken Tomlinson. The work of certified golf course superintendent, Bob Graunke, shows Tomlinson's layout in a consistently shining light and doubtless helped in the course's climb from No. 28 to No. 19.

No review of the 2005 poll would

be complete without mention of a small but significant shuffle in the highest bracket. **THE OCEAN COURSE AT KIAWAH ISLAND RESORT** edged into the No. 3 spot pushing **LONG COVE CLUB** on Hilton Head Island to No. 4. The very winds and surf that helped shape the terrain Pete Dye made famous at the Ocean Course are now eating away at the course itself. With the U.S. Senior Open there in

2007 and the PGA Championship due in 2012, there is much at stake in the search for a solution, perhaps ultimately the honor of being South Carolina's No. 1. **SCM**

HOW WE RATE THEM

The South Carolina Golf Course Ratings Panel has recruited over 100 golf enthusiasts representing a diverse range of occupations, handicaps and backgrounds and charged them with the task of identifying the best that South Carolina golf has to offer. The Panel promotes excellence in South Carolina golf course design and operations through competitive rankings, education and public advocacy. In addition, it is a goal of the Panel to serve as an ambassador for golf in South Carolina, stimulating the promotion and marketing of outstanding golf courses, resorts, and real estate developments in the state.

Each year the Panel, which is jointly sponsored by South Carolina Magazine and SC Golf Today, ranks South Carolina's 50 Greatest Courses and the Best New Course of the Year.

In rating courses panelists consider the following criteria:

- **ROUTING** – How the course flows from hole to hole, including its harmony with existing topography.
- **DESIGN BALANCE** – The degree to which the course places demands on a full range of shot requirements.
- **STRATEGY** – How design features test course management.
- **EQUITY** – The course's capacity to reward good shots and penalize poor ones equitably.
- **MEMORABILITY** – How distinctive and memorable is the golf course and individual holes.
- **AESTHETICS** – The degree to which conditioning, scenery and surrounds lend to one's enjoyment.
- **EXPERIENCE** – An combination of all elements of the round from pro shop, to practice range, clubhouse and more.

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THE 50 BEST GOLF COURSES IN SC 2005



1 HARBOUR TOWN GOLF LINKS – SEA PINES RESORT
(HILTON HEAD ISLAND) – R

2 SAGE VALLEY GOLF CLUB
(GRANITEVILLE) – P

**3 THE OCEAN COURSE–
KIAWAH ISLAND RESORT** – R

4 LONG COVE CLUB
(HILTON HEAD ISLAND) – P

**5 MAY RIVER GOLF CLUB
AT PALMETTO BLUFF**
(BLUFFTON) – SP

- 6 GREENVILLE COUNTRY CLUB – CHANTICLEER COURSE** – P
7 YEAMANS HALL CLUB (Hanahan) – P
8 THE DUNES GOLF & BEACH CLUB (Myrtle Beach) – SP
9 KIAWAH ISLAND CLUB – CASSIQUE COURSE – P
10 BULLS BAY GOLF CLUB (Awendaw) – P
11 MUSGROVE MILL GOLF CLUB (Clinton) – P
12 SECESSION GOLF CLUB (Beaufort) – P
13 THE CLIFFS AT KEOWEE (Sunset) – P
14 KIAWAH ISLAND CLUB – RIVER COURSE – P
15 PALMETTO GOLF CLUB (Aiken) – P
16 THE GOLF CLUB AT BRIAR'S CREEK (Johns Island) – P
17 CALEDONIA GOLF & FISH CLUB (Pawleys Island) – R
18 THE RESERVE AT LITCHFIELD (Pawleys Island) – P
19 TIDEWATER GOLF CLUB & PLANTATION (Little River) – SP
20 CHECHESSEE CREEK CLUB (Okatie) – P
21 OLD TABBY LINKS (Spring Island) – P
22 THE RESERVE AT LAKE KEOWEE (Sunset) – P
23 COLLETON RIVER PLANTATION - NICKLAUS COURSE (Bluffton) – P
24 THE LINKS COURSE - WILD DUNES RESORT (Isle of Palms) – R
25 DANIEL ISLAND CLUB – BERESFORD CREEK COURSE (Charleston) – P
26 COLLETON RIVER PLANTATION – DYE COURSE (Bluffton) – P
27 CAMDEN COUNTRY CLUB – P
28 BELFAIR GOLF CLUB - WEST COURSE (Bluffton) – P
29 COUNTRY CLUB OF CHARLESTON – P
30 THE PATRIOT AT GRAND HARBOR (Greenwood) – P
31 THE MEMBERS CLUB AT GRANDE DUNES (Myrtle Beach) – P
32 MOUNT VINTAGE PLANTATION & GOLF CLUB (North Augusta) – SP
33 TRUE BLUE PLANTATION (Pawleys Island) – R
34 THE CLIFFS AT GLASSY (Landrum) – P
35 THE RESORT COURSE AT GRANDE DUNES (Myrtle Beach) – R
36 HAIG POINT CLUB (Daufuskie Island) – P
37 WACHESAW PLANTATION (Murrells Inlet) – SP
38 THORNBLADE CLUB (Greer) – P
39 TURTLE POINT COURSE - KIAWAH ISLAND RESORT – R
40 BELFAIR GOLF CLUB - EAST COURSE (Bluffton) – P
41 THE RESERVE AT WOODSIDE PLANTATION (Aiken) – P
42 COLUMBIA COUNTRY CLUB – P
43 MELROSE COURSE - DAUFUSKIE ISLAND RESORT – R
44 THE DYE COURSE AT BAREFOOT RESORT (North Myrtle Beach) – R
45 THE LOVE COURSE AT BAREFOOT RESORT (North Myrtle Beach) – R
46 BLOODY POINT COURSE - DAUFUSKIE ISLAND RESORT – R
47 OLDFIELD GOLF CLUB (Okatie) – P
48 BERKELEY HALL – NORTH COURSE (Bluffton) – P
49 TPC OF MYRTLE BEACH (Murrells Inlet) – R
50 THE FAZIO COURSE AT BAREFOOT RESORT (North Myrtle Beach) – R

P = Private: Open Only to Guests of Members
 SP = Semi-Private: Open to Limited Outside Play
 R = Resort: Open to Public

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